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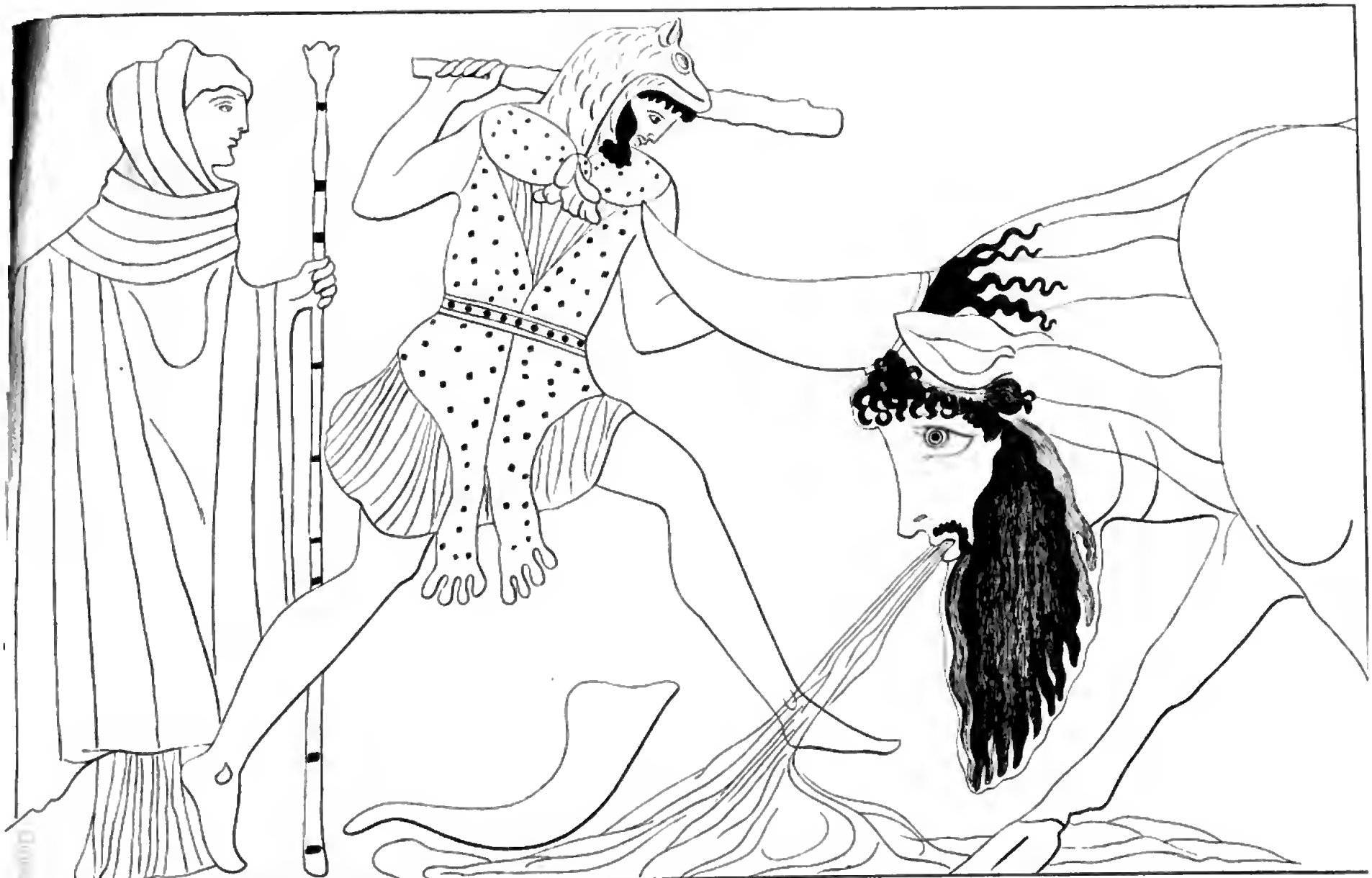

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CONTEST BETWEEN HERCULES AND THE ACHELOÜS.

III. *On a Fictile Vase, representing the Contest between Hercules and the Acheloüs.* *By* James Millingen, Esq. *Royal Associate.*

Read January 6th, 1830.

On a former occasion I had the honour of presenting to the Royal Society of Literature the design of an ancient coin of Metapontum, commemorative of public games celebrated in that city in honour of the Acheloüs.[1] This curious and hitherto unique numismatic monument, which illustrates various passages of Sophocles, Strabo, and other ancient authors, afforded at the same time an opportunity of offering some remarks on the different forms which ancient artists attributed to Rivers; and more particularly on the figure of an Androcephalous Bull, so frequently represented on coins and other works of art.

This figure, the object of so much controversy, and generally supposed by modern antiquaries[2] to represent Bacchus Hebon, I considered as the personification of a river, according to the opinion of those writers who first discussed the question.

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[1] Read February 16, 1825. Printed in Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature. London, 1827. Vol. I. Part I. p. 142.

[2] Eckhell. Doctrina Numorum Veterum, Tom. i. p. 129, seqq. Visconti, Museo Pio Clem. Tom. v. p. 18. Lanzi, Dei Vasi Antichi dipinti, Firenze, 1805. p. 172. R. P. Knight's Inquiry into the Symbolical Language of Ancient Art, London, 1818: sect. 28.

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In confirmation of the arguments alleged in my preceding Memoir in favour of this opinion, I have now to offer to the Society the copy of a most interesting painting, taken from a fictile Vase, lately found at Girgenti, the ancient Agrigentum; a city celebrated for its splendour, and the magnificence of its inhabitants, whose taste for the arts is attested by the many precious remains of sculpture and painting frequently discovered amongst its ruins.

There can be no doubt that the subject of this composition, is the contest between Hercules and the Acheloüs, for the possession of Deïaneira, previously betrothed to the Acheloüs by her father Œneus, king of Calydon.

Hercules appears with his usual attributes, a club, and the skin of the Cithæronian lion, which he has put on, and which serves instead of a cuirass and helmet, in the manner described by Apollodorus.[3]

The Acheloüs is represented in the form of a bull with a human head, as on the coins of Acarnania and Ætolia; a stream of water flowing from his mouth, indicates specially a river. Unable to resist the superior strength of his adversary, he seems on the point of yielding the prize contested for. One of his horns is already broken, and lying on the ground; he is severely wounded, and the stream which issues from his mouth is red with blood.

The circumstances expressed by the author of the painting, correspond perfectly with those described by ancient writers. According to Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus, and others,[4] the Acheloüs assumed on this occasion the form of a bull. Sophocles[5] describes him as taking, among other metamorphoses, the same figure. In all accounts, Hercules breaks one of the horns of his adversary; to whom, according to some traditions, he restored it in exchange for the horn of Amalthæa,[6] which he gave to Œneus as a present, (*δῶρον*,) in return for the hand of his daughter.

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[3] *Τὴν μὲν δορὰν ἠμφιέσατο, τῷ χάσματι δὲ ἐχρήσατο κόρυθι.* Lib. ii. cap. iv. 11.

[4] Apollodorus, lib. ii. cap. vii. 5. Hyginus, Fab. 31. Diodorus Siculus, lib. iv. cap. 34. 35.

[5] Trachiniai, ver. 11.

[6] Apollodorus, loc. cit. Strabo, lib. x. p. 458.

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The female figure standing behind Hercules is probably Deïaneira, object and prize of the contest. She is attired with an ample mantle, which covers her head in lieu of a veil: she holds a sceptre, emblem of her regal descent. In the Trachiniai of Sophocles,[7] Deïaneira, bewailing her misfortunes, says that she was present at the fierce contest, but so much overwhelmed by terror, that she was senseless, and unable to describe it.

Καὶ τρόπον μὲν ἂν πόνων
Οὐκ ἂν διείποιμ'· (οὐ γὰρ οἶδ')· ἀλλ' ὅστις ἦν
Θακῶν ἀναρβὴς τῆς θέας, ὅδ' ἂν λέγοι.
Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤμην ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ.

The combat between Hercules and the Acheloïs, an event of which no votive representation has hitherto been published,[8] was anciently figured by Bathycles, on the throne of Apollo, at Amyclæ, a work of a very early age.[9] In the treasury of the Megareans, at Elis,[10] was a group of small statues of cedar, inlaid or ornamented with gold, representing Hercules combating Acheloïs. Jupiter and Deïaneira were present; Mars appeared on the side of Acheloïs, and Minerva afforded her protection to the Theban hero.

It may be proper to notice here, that in the figure of the Acheloïs we have a proof that a similar figure with a stream issuing from its mouth, a common type of the coins of Aluntium in Sicily,[11] is the river Chydas, which flowed near that city, and that it is not, as M. Avellino supposes,[12] allusive to the bull which, according to Nonnus, was sent by Juno, and which occasioned the death of Ampelus.

In addition to the present monument, I beg to offer drawings from two ancient gems, which relate to the same subject. They are of an early

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[7] Vers. 21. 24.

[8] The monuments which have been given to the public as representing this fable are of Hercules and the Crelan Bull, or Theseus and the Minotaur.

[9] Πεποίηται καὶ ἡ πρὸς Ἀχελῷον Ἡρακλέους πάλη. Pausanias, lib. iii. cap. 18.

From this description it may be inferred that Hercules was wrestling with the Acheloïs, perhaps in the same attitude as in the engraved gem, No. 1.

[10] Pausanias, lib. vi. cap. 19.

[11] Torremuzza, Siciliæ Veteres Nummi, Tab. xiv. fig. 9. 10. 11.

[12] Vide Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, Tom. i. Part i. p. 150.

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style, probably engraved on scarabus, and hitherto unpublished. In one we see the Acheloüs figured as a man, with the horns only of a bull, precisely in the same manner as on the coin of Metapontum, represented in my former Memoir. In the other the river god appears, as in the painting we are now considering, as a humanized bull, which Hercules is strangling in his arms. [13]

These gems, of an early epoch, afford another proof of the liberty taken by ancient artists in varying the forms of what may be called allegorical personages. Thus the Harpies and the Sirens sometimes appear simply as winged females, and at other times with the upper part only human, and the lower part, or even the body, of birds.[14] Hence we must not be surprised if on Sicilian coins, particularly those of Catanea and Gelas, rivers appear under different forms, sometimes as a bull, sometimes as the Acheloüs, and frequently as a young man with horns on the forehead.

A fictile vase in the collection of the Duke de Blacas, affords a subject which has great reference to that under consideration. A bull with a human head is standing near a fountain: on his back a female figure is seated, holding a vase. A male winged figure placed above, presents her with a wreath and apple. On the other side of the fountain is another female figure, holding a mirror and a libatory vase. The Androcephalous figure is, in all probability, a river,[15] and the female seated on him a nymph, characterised by a vase or urn, the usual attribute of fountains and rivers.

I regret to be unable to offer a copy of this interesting subject, but hope it will soon be made public, with the whole collection of its possessor.

Since my preceding Memoir relating to the present question was presented to the Society, M. Avellino has published a new edition of his Dissertation on the subject,[16] with various additional arguments.

The learned author premises by stating "that from what had been "previously said, it might perhaps appear that all doubts respecting the "signification of the Androcephalous Bull are not entirely removed. Be-

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[13] Vide supra, Not. 9.

[14] Vide Millingen, Antient Unedited Monuments, Series 1. p. 39.

[15] In a bas-relief, dedicated to the Nymphs in a grotto of the island of Paros, the river god is figured with the horns of a bull. Stuart, Antiq. of Athens, Tom. iv. pl. 51.

[16] Oposcoli Diversi di F. M. Avellino, etc. etc. Napoli, 1826. Volume Primo, p. 81. seqq.

" cause, though the authority of ancient writers and monuments may be " adduced in favour of Bacchus, yet we must confess that, independently " of the arguments alleged by many archæologists, the coins of the " Acarnanians are in favour of the Acheloüs and of rivers.

" Hence, though we are disposed to adopt rather the former of these two " opinions, we are nevertheless persuaded that it must be considered, as " Eckhell has qualified it, as merely probable (*verisimile.*)

" If then it is useless to recur to the testimony of authors, let us try if " with the assistance of the coins themselves we may obtain means to " fortify, in some degree, our conjecture. It appears to me that this end is " attained by those among the coins of Naples which present the fore- " part only of the Androcephalous animal with a star impressed on its " side.

" This star cannot be considered as a mere accessory symbol, like those " of the mint or of magistrates usually seen in the field of coins, but it is " placed on the bull itself, as indicating a peculiar emblem or attribute.

" If this is admitted by the reader, two consequences arise in favour of " our opinion; 1st, that the figure cannot represent a river, since the star " would in that case be an emblem wholly unsuitable; 2nd, that we recog- " nize herein Bacchus Hebon, to whom no symbol could be better appro- " priated than a star."

The learned author, after quoting various testimonies to show that Bacchus was the same divinity as the Sun and Apollo, thus concludes: " But " supposing even that all other arguments in favour of our opinion were " wanting, the sole expressions of Macrobius would be sufficient to esta- " blish it. We are told by this writer, that an aged and bearded divinity " was worshipped by the Neapolitans; and in fact, the bull with the " human head is the only divinity of this kind which appears on the coins " of Naples. A peculiar and special name (Hebon) is assigned to this " divinity, and hence it probably received a form wholly distinct, by which " its peculiar denomination should be expressed. This divinity was in- " tended to denote by its wings the variations of the Sun; and we find " accordingly the star of the Sun represented on the bull on the coins of " Naples. What correspondence and relation result then from these " considerations between the Androcephalous Bull and the Hebon of Ma- " crobius?"

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In reply to these new arguments of M. Avellino, I shall observe, 1st, that on the coins of Naples with the figure in question, we find in the field a great variety of objects, probably the symbols or ἐπίσημα of the mint-master or the magistrate who superintended the coinage: such are a caduceus, a vase, a bunch of grapes, and also a star. Hence, it is possible that on the coins alluded to by M. Avellino, the star may be only a mark of this kind. Sometimes in fact initial letters are thus placed; as for example, on the flank of a bull on the coins of Thurium, and on the Pegasus of coins of Ambracia, besides other instances. It should be noticed, moreover, that among the numerous coins of Naples, abounding in every collection, scarcely one out of a hundred presents the mark placed on the side of the animal; and, therefore, no general inference can be deduced from what must be considered merely as an exception.

But allowing that the emblem was peculiar to the principal figure, no inference could be drawn in favour of Bacchus. The type might represent the celestial or zodiacal bull: or it might be a river, for there is no reason why the Neapolitans should not have placed the Sebethus among the constellations in the same manner as the Eridanus and Oceanus or Nile were placed by some astronomers. The divine honours paid to rivers by the ancients are too well attested to be called in question.

2. It is true that, according to the Orphic doctrines, Bacchus was identified with Apollo and the Sun. But these doctrines were introduced into Greece at a late period, they were confined to a sect, and never formed part of the religion of the state.

3. The conclusions drawn from the passage of Macrobius do not appear admissible. Because Hebon was venerated at Naples *barbata et senili specie*, it does not follow that he was the only divinity of the kind in that city. Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto, Mercury, and Æsculapius were, without doubt, also worshipped there, and figured in the same manner, *barbata et senili specie.* Nor can it be implied that, because the only bearded figure on the Neapolitan coins is a humanized bull, that it must represent Hebon. It might be Jupiter or Neptune thus metamorphosed.

4. Were we to admit the conclusions of M. Avellino, it would be evident, from the authority of Macrobius, that Hebon being a divinity entirely peculiar to Naples, he would be represented in the special manner alluded to by the Neapolitans alone. What explanation have we then to give of

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